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NEGATIVE
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64 PAGES

NEGATIVE BURN

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VOLUME ONE • NUMBER THIRTY-TWO

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illustrated by Mark Badger

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by Brian Bolland

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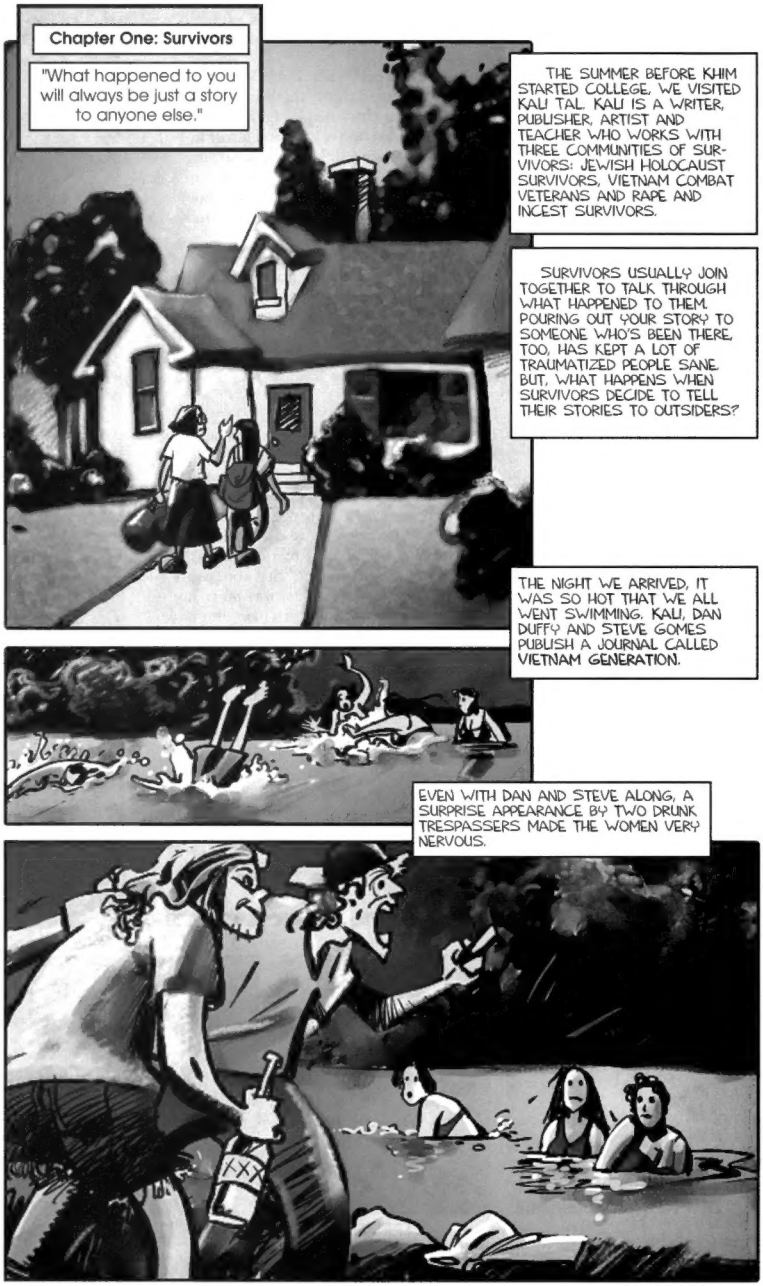
Our Cancer Year (Four Walls, Eight Windows NY 1994) is a book length autobio comic that I wrote with my husband Harvey Pekar and illustrated by Frank Stack. Our Cancer Year (OCY) was about a season and a half in hell (much of it of our own making) that we spent battling Harvey's non-Hodgkin's lymphoma while Operation Desert Storm turned into Desert Shield. It's also a book about friendship and family-- and friends who become family.

When Harvey got sick, I was working on another one of my nonfiction documentary comics, this time about what surviving war does to then-teenagers like Dana, Khim, Jessie, Ju, Saroeum, Uri and Zamir who all appear as "characters" in OCY. During our cancer year I lost my so-called objectivity while trying to finish the comic and was lucky enough to get a chance to stop being a writer and become friends with the kids instead.

One day Khim asked me if I thought she should study psychology when she started college, to perhaps become a therapist in order to work with kids who, like Khim, had been tortured, abused, lived through wars or witnessed mass killings and other atrocities. I was not sure. I'm still not sure. When Khim is sure, she'll know what to do. By now we've both heard arguments for something American shrinks call "closure... moving beyond survivor 'guilt' that compels one to try to save the world" and reasons why trauma hurts and keeps hurting until one finds a way to turn pain into understanding.

I understand things best when I try to write through them, in public or in private (journal entries and letters.) I invented a new comic book as a way for us to travel together and look for some answers, then convinced publisher Glenn Thompson of Writers & Readers, people from Vietnam Generation and artist Mark Badger to back us up. Together with Saroeum and some other Cambodian American friends we've met since we're writing a comic about growing up Cambodian in America. This is the first chapter.

Joyce Brabner


Chapter One: Survivors
"What happened to you will always be just a story to anyone else."
THE SUMMER BEFORE KHIM STARTED COLLEGE, WE VISITED KALI TAL. KALI IS A WRITER, PUBLISHER, ARTIST AND TEACHER WHO WORKS WITH THREE COMMUNITIES OF SURVIVORS: JEWISH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS, VIETNAM COMBAT VETERANS AND RAPE AND INCEST SURVIVORS.
SURVIVORS USUALLY JOIN TOGETHER TO TALK THROUGH WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM. POURING OUT YOUR STORY TO SOMEONE WHO'S BEEN THERE, TOO, HAS KEPT A LOT OF TRAUMATIZED PEOPLE SANE. BUT, WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SURVIVORS DECIDE TO TELL THEIR STORIES TO OUTSIDERS?
THE NIGHT WE ARRIVED, IT WAS SO HOT THAT WE ALL WENT SWIMMING. KALI, DAN DUFFY AND STEVE GOMES PUBLISH A JOURNAL CALLED VIETNAM GENERATION.
EVEN WITH DAN AND STEVE ALONG, A SURPRISE APPEARANCE BY TWO DRUNK TRESPASSERS MADE THE WOMEN VERY NERVOUS.

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU IN CAMBODIA-- YOUR TRAUMA-- WILL ALWAYS BE JUST "A STORY" TO ANYONE ELSE.
WHAT HOLOCAUST, VIETNAM COMBAT VETERANS AND RAPE AND INCEST SURVIVORS ALL HAVE IN COMMON IS A DESIRE TO BEAR WITNESS TO WHAT THEY SURVIVED.
THE NEXT NIGHT, KHIM TURNED ON HER TAPE RECORDER AND INTERVIEWED KALI.

WHEN THEY START TELLING THEIR STORIES TO PEOPLE WHO WEREN'T THERE, THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED ARE (AT FIRST) SHOCKED. WHEN PEOPLE FIRST HEAR HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS TALK ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED IN NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMPS IT SOUNDS INCREDIBLE, UNBELIEVABLE... THERE'S RESISTANCE FROM THE AUDIENCE. BUT, SURVIVOR STORIES HAVE (AND IT'S TERRIBLE TO SAY THIS) A LOT OF THE ELEMENTS OF GOOD FICTION. THEY ARE "GOOD" STORIES. PEOPLE ARE DRAWN TO HORROR MOVIES OR DRAMATIC PRODUCTIONS THAT ARE NOT "HAPPY," BECAUSE OTHER PEOPLE'S TRAUMA IS INTERESTING: IT DIDN'T HAPPEN TO US, BUT IT'S REALLY INTERESTING TO HEAR BECAUSE WE CAN SORT OF IMAGINE IT HAPPENING TO US.
IF YOU'RE A WOMAN WHO HAS BEEN RAPED, YOUR REACTIONS TO A SLASHER MOVIE ARE COMPLETELY DIFFERENT, YOU KNOW WHAT CAN HAPPEN TO YOU.
TELLING YOUR STORY AGAIN AND AGAIN DOESN'T BRIDGE THAT GAP BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING. IT DOESN'T CHANGE PEOPLE AT A GUT LEVEL. PEOPLE REWARD YOU FOR ONLY TELLING YOUR STORY. THEY'LL ENFOLD YOU, AND MAKE YOU A VICTIM-- WHICH CAN BE VERY COMFORTABLE.
I HATE THAT! I HATE WHEN PEOPLE PITY ME.

PEOPLE'S TOLERANCE FOR HORROR GETS HIGHER AND HIGHER. THE SURVIVORS WITH THE VERY WORST STORIES GET BROUGHT FORWARD, WHICH INVALIDATES THE STORIES OF THE PEOPLE WHO DIDN'T SUFFER THE MOST EXTREME ATROCITIES. THE STORYTELLERS WHO HAVE SURVIVED THOSE TERRIBLE ATROCITIES BECOME ISOLATED BECAUSE THEY BECOME FIGUREHEADS. SOME PEOPLE BECOME PROFESSIONAL SURVIVORS...
IF YOU TELL YOUR STORY WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT IT IS YOU WANT PEOPLE TO DO, YOUR STORY WILL LOSE ITS POWER. TODAY, SURVIVOR STORIES GET TURNED INTO MILLION DOLLAR MOVIES.

LATER...
HOW DO YOU FEEL NOW ABOUT GOING FIRST?
I STILL WANT TO DO IT. BUT, I KNOW WHAT KALI MEANS ABOUT AUDIENCES...
I GET ASKED TO TALK ABOUT MY LIFE AT PEACE CONFERENCES.
I DO IT BECAUSE I WANT PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND AND BECAUSE I BELIEVE IN WORKING AGAINST WAR, AGAINST VIOLENCE.
BUT, I'M ALMOST ALWAYS THE ONLY CAMBODIAN AND PEOPLE KNOW THAT MY SURVIVOR STORY IS PRETTY BAD. SO, THEY'LL ASK ME TO TALK FIRST, TO GET THE AUDIENCE'S ATTENTION...
OR, LAST. LIKE THEY HAVE TO BUILD UP TO ME. TO BE "DRAMATIC." SOMETIMES...
SOMETIMES, IT MAKES ME FEEL USED.
DO YOU WANT TO WORK ON THE BOOK IN ANOTHER WAY? WE CAN START WITH SOMEONE ELSE.
I WANT THEM TO KNOW WHO I AM. BUT, I'M STILL NOT SURE WHAT I WANT READERS TO DO, AFTER...

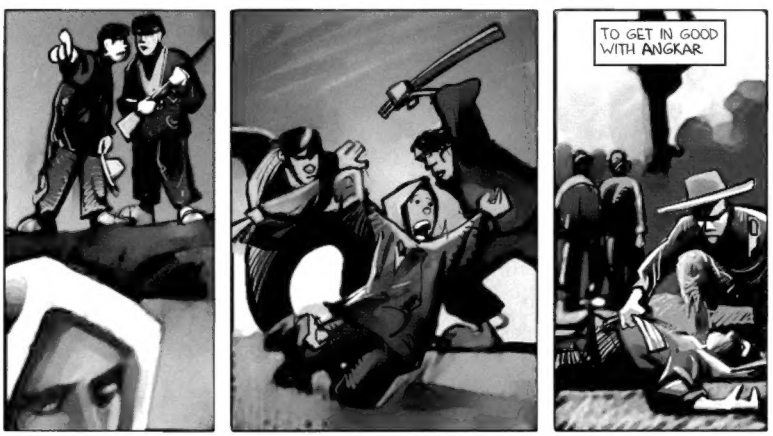
KHIM'S STORY
IT WAS APRIL, 1975. WE LIVED IN THE BIG CITY, PHNOM PENH. I WAS LITTLE. MY MOTHER WAS CARRYING ME AND HOLDING MY SISTER BY THE HAND. I THINK WE WERE GOING TO MARKET.
THUNDER, MOMMY? RAIN DOWN ON KHIM ALL WET?
BAD RAIN, MOMMY, BAD...
KA-BOOM!!!
MOMMY?!!!

WE FOUND MY FATHER AND BROTHERS AT HOME, PACKED AND READY TO LEAVE.
THIS CAN'T GO ON MUCH LONGER. AS SOON AS IT'S SAFE, WE GO.
THE HOUSE?
ONLY WHAT WE CAN CARRY. THESE ARE OUR TREASURES.
ONE THING MORE..
MOTHER MUST HAVE PUT THEIR WEDDING PICTURE IN HER PACK. IT'S THE ONLY PICTURE WE HAVE OF HIM.
THE KHMER ROUGE SOLDIERS WHO MARCHED INTO OUR CITY HAD DEAD EYES. THEY WERE FOLLOWING SOMETHING WE COULDN'T SEE.

I KNOW NOW THAT MANY WERE SCARED FARM KIDS, SOME AS YOUNG AS 10, FOLLOWING LYING PROMISES OF FOOD, LAND AND POWER.
LEAVE YOUR HOMES IMMEDIATELY! YOU ARE NOT SAFE HERE. TAKE ONLY WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS, UNTIL WE CAN SECURE THE CITY.
IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG TO REALIZE THAT THESE WERE NOT OUR RESCUERS.
EDUCATED DOCTORS, TEACHERS, PRIESTS, BUSINESSMEN OR MEMBERS OF LON NOL'S GOVERNMENT: ANYONE WHO WORE EYEGLASSES FOR READING, WHO HAD SOFT, WHITE HANDS... THEY WERE NOW TARGETS.
POL POT'S BIG PLAN WAS TO TURN CAMBODIA INTO A GIANT RICE FARM WHERE EVERYONE WORKED TOGETHER AS EQUALS.

"EQUAL" MEANT NO RESPECT FOR OUR ELDERS. NO MOTHERS AND FATHERS. NO MORE FAMILIES. ANGKAR WAS OUR FAMILY NOW, THE "AUTHORITY." AND POL POT WAS "BROTHER NUMBER ONE."
THAT'S WHY THEY SENT MY SISTER AND BROTHERS TO THREE DIFFERENT WORK CAMPS TO LIVE ONLY WITH KIDS THEIR OWN AGE AND A KHMER ROUGE "TEACHER." MY FATHER WAS SEPARATED FROM MY MOTHER. I WAS ALLOWED TO STAY WITH HER ONLY BECAUSE I WAS SO YOUNG.
"WORK OR BE KILLED. "EVEN US LITTLE KIDS. THE FENCE AROUND US WAS ELECTRIFIED. WE WERE ALWAYS HUNGRY.

THE WORST PUNISHMENTS WERE FOR STEALING FOOD. PEOPLE SPIED ON EACH OTHER: FRIEND AGAINST FRIEND, EVEN KIDS AGAINST PARENTS...


TO GET IN GOOD WITH ANGKAR

FATHER WAS DYING BECAUSE HE WOULDNT EAT THE FOOD HE NEEDED. HE SAVED HIS RATIONS FOR US, INSTEAD
MOTHER NEVER SHOWS HER TEARS ANY-MORE... SOMETHING REALLY BAD MUST BE HAPPENING
PLEASE, HONORED BROTHER. ONLY A LITTLE MEDICINE.
SISTER, PLEASE! HALF A CUP OF RICE, SO HE MAY CONT-INUE TO SERVE OUR GREAT CAUSE?
FOR THAT ONE? HAH! HE'S WORTHLESS, WEAK...
YOU STUPID WOMAN! YOU'VE DRAINED HIS STRENGTH. HE'LL BE DEAD BY MORNING AND YOU'VE NO ONE TO BLAME BUT YOURSELF!
YOU HEAR THAT, YOU GREEDY LITTLE BRAT? IT'S HER FAULT. AND YOURS.

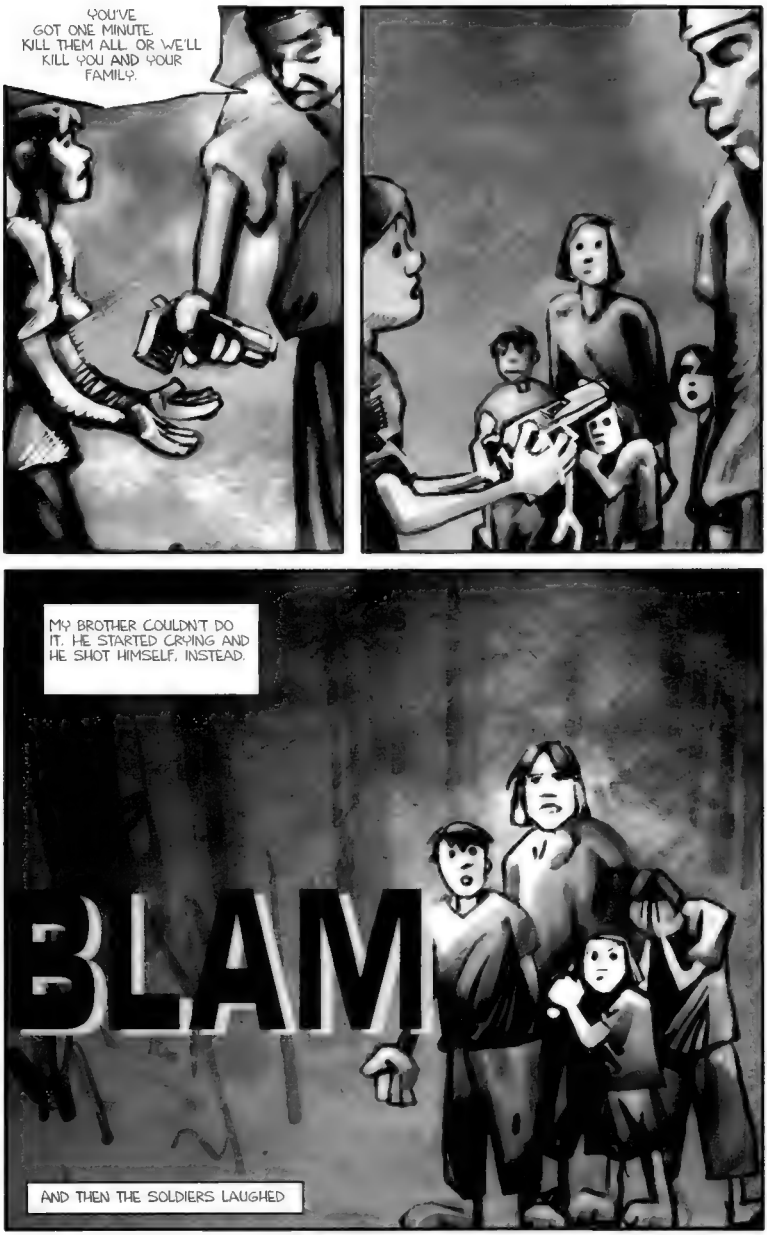
DON'T CRY... I'LL DO BETTER. I DON'T NEED FOOD EVERY DAY. I'LL BE GOOD I PROMISE.
AFTER FATHER DIED, OUR GROUP WAS MOVED DEEPER INTO THE FOREST, PAST WHERE BODIES WERE DUMPED.
DEATH SMELLS BAD. WORSE THAN GARBAGE. AND EVEN THE TREES WERE DEAD
WE HAD ONLY A 12 INCH PATH TO FOLLOW. THE REST OF THE GROUND HAD HIDDEN LAND MINES
CARRY YOUR SISTER. KHIM'S TIRED. IF SHE STUMBLES...
WAAAAA!
LITTLE BABY, STAY QUIET! OR THE SOLDIERS WILL...
OH, GOD...! DON'T LOOK KHIM, DON'T LOOK...

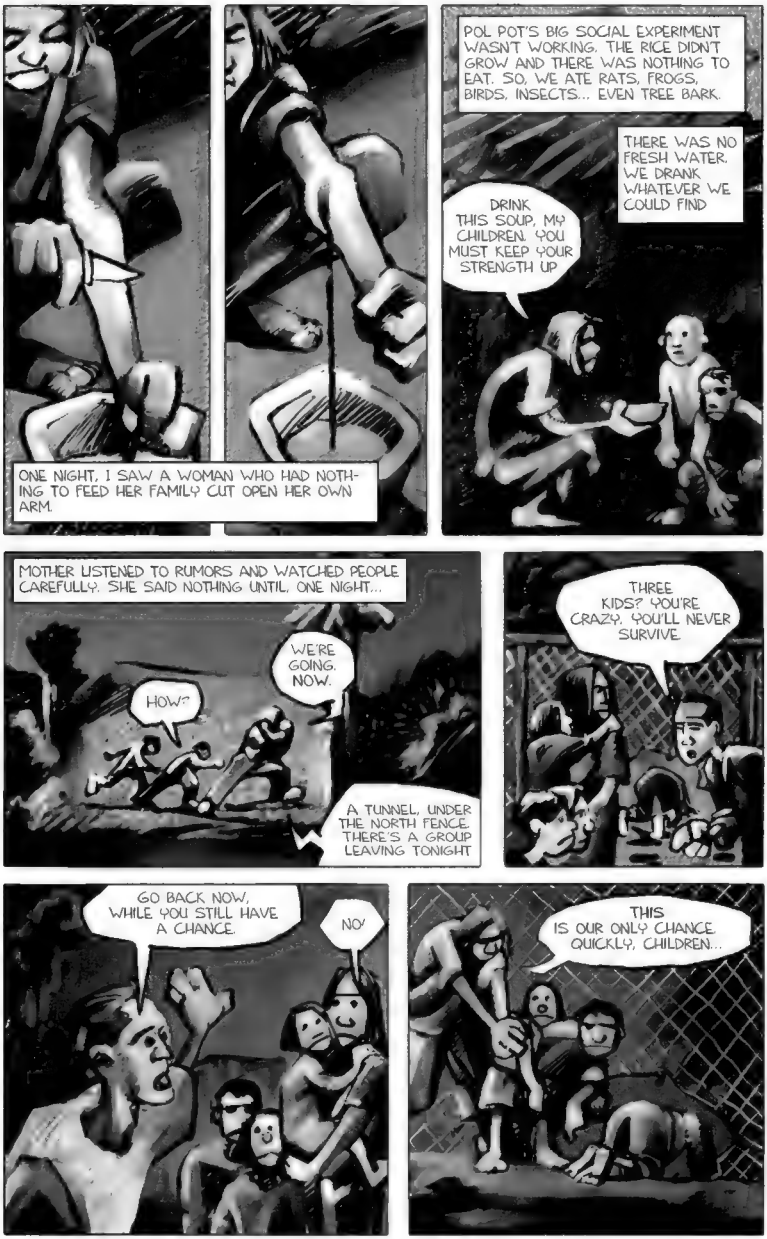
I SAW OTHER CHILDREN. BABIES CRYING...EVEN THOUGH THEIR MOTHERS WERE DEAD, BABIES WERE CLIMBING ON TOP OF THEIR MOTHERS AND CRYING. PART OF THE MOTHERS' ARMS OR OTHER PARTS OF THEIR BODIES... CUT OPEN. OR HEADS CUT OFF.
I SAW PEOPLE BOILED ALIVE, HUNG FROM TREES...
THE SOLDIERS MADE US LOOK. THEY MADE US WATCH SO THEY COULD CONTROL US. I SAW THEM CUT UP "ENEMIES OF ANGKAR" SLOWLY, PIECE BY PIECE. IT WASN'T ENOUGH TO SHOOT THEM. THEY HAD TO MAKE THEM SUFFER...

THEY MADE US LITTLE KIDS STAND THERE AND WATCH. WE WEREN'T ALLOWED TO CLOSE OUR EYES. OR CRY. IF WE MOVED OR MADE A SOUND-- EVEN IF IT WAS OUR OWN FAMILY-- WE WERE NEXT.
THEY DID EVERYTHING THEY COULD TO BREAK THE LOVE AND TRUST OF FAMILIES.

BOY! IS THAT YOUR SISTER?
GIVE HER TO ME!
YES, SIR!

KHIM, DO WHATEVER HE SAYS. NO MATTER WHAT. DO IT.
THE REST OF HIS FAMILY, STEP FORWARD!


YOU'VE GOT ONE MINUTE. KILL THEM ALL, OR WE'LL KILL YOU AND YOUR FAMILY.
MY BROTHER COULDN'T DO IT. HE STARTED CRYING AND HE SHOT HIMSELF, INSTEAD.
BLAM
AND THEN THE SOLDIERS LAUGHED


ONE NIGHT, I SAW A WOMAN WHO HAD NOTHING TO FEED HER FAMILY CUT OPEN HER OWN ARM.
POL POT'S BIG SOCIAL EXPERIMENT WASN'T WORKING. THE RICE DIDN'T GROW AND THERE WAS NOTHING TO EAT. SO, WE ATE RATS, FROGS, BIRDS, INSECTS... EVEN TREE BARK.
THERE WAS NO FRESH WATER. WE DRANK WHATEVER WE COULD FIND
DRINK THIS SOUP, MY CHILDREN. YOU MUST KEEP YOUR STRENGTH UP
MOTHER LISTENED TO RUMORS AND WATCHED PEOPLE CAREFULLY. SHE SAID NOTHING UNTIL ONE NIGHT...
WE'RE GOING. NOW.
HOW?
A TUNNEL, UNDER THE NORTH FENCE. THERE'S A GROUP LEAVING TONIGHT
THREE KIDS? YOU'RE CRAZY. YOU'LL NEVER SURVIVE
GO BACK NOW, WHILE YOU STILL HAVE A CHANCE.
NO!
THIS IS OUR ONLY CHANCE. QUICKLY, CHILDREN...

WE WALKED FOR ALMOST 2 YEARS. DIFFERENT SOLDIERS WOULD CATCH US, TAKE ADVANTAGE OF US...
ONE WOMAN AND THREE KIDS? WE WERE EASY TARGETS. BUT, MOTHER MADE US KEEP GOING
DO YOU WANT ME TO SHOW YOU ON A MAP? WE WENT THROUGH THE CAMBODIAN JUNGLE TO THAILAND, THEN TO LAOS AND VIETNAM. THEN, BY RAFT TO THE PHILIPPINES. JUST PIECES OF WOOD TIED TOGETHER, REALLY.
WE STAYED FOR MANY MONTHS IN A CAMP RUN BY AN AMERICAN HUMANITARIAN AID ORGANIZATION UNTIL A SPONSOR WAS FOUND FOR OUR FAMILY.
WE ARRIVED IN SAN FRANCISCO. THEN, A BUS TOOK US TO LOS ANGELES. WE NEVER TRAVELED BEFORE.
I THREW UP ON THE PLANE. MY SISTER THREW UP ON THE BUS...
AND, THAT'S THE FIRST PART OF MY STORY.
I'M THINKING ABOUT BUN. HE'S NOT SURE HE WAS REUNITED WITH HIS REAL PARENTS. HE KNOWS THEY HAD A SON HIS AGE. HE REMEMBERS THE TOWN HE LIVED IN...
BUT, HE WAS LITTLE AND FORGOT HIS FAMILY NAME. HE THINKS HIS PARENTS ARE WONDERING THE SAME THING ABOUT HIM.
IT'S NOT SOMETHING THEY'LL EVER TALK ABOUT. WHEN YOU'RE ASIAN, FAMILY IS EVERYTHING. I WAS SURPRISED HE EVEN SAID IT OUT LOUD TO US.
HE SAID CHANGE HIS NAME IN THE BOOK.
AGAIN.
RIGHT. AGAIN.

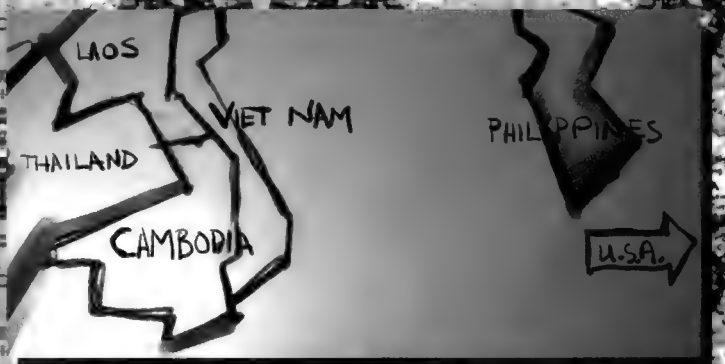
Other Cambodian Survivor Stories

Books:

A Cambodian Odyssey
By Haing Ngor Warner Books, 1987.
Cambodian Witness: An Autobiography
By Someth May Random House, 1986.
The Death and Life of Dith Pran
By Sydney H. Schanberg Viking, 1985
To Destroy You Is No Loss
By Joan D. Criddle Anchor Books, 1987.
The Far East Comes Near: Autobiographical Accounts of Southeast Asian Students in America.
University of Massachusetts Press, 1989.
The Prince Still Smiled
By Carl Lawrence Tyndale House Publishers, 1979.
Spirit of Survival
By Gail Sheehy Morrow, 1986.
Stay Alive, My Son
By Pin Yathay. Simon & Schuster, 19887
The Stones Cry Out : A Cambodian Childhood
By Molyda Szymusiak, Hill and Wang, 1986.

Videos:

The Killing Fields, Warner Home Video, 1985.
Samsara, Direct Cinema Limited, 1989
Kim Yon Tan, A Voice for Peace
Escapes from Cambodia
Shoreview, MN. AAUW, 1990



HAVE A NICE DAY

AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY IN **CHINESE TURKESTAN** A VISITOR TO THE TOWN OF **URUMQI** COULD OFTEN SEE IN USE A CUNNINGLY DESIGNED CAGE-LIKE DEVICE CALLED A **KAPAS**.

THE VICTIM OF THIS PARTICULARLY CRUEL FORM OF EXECUTION WOULD BE INCARCERATED INSIDE THE CAGE, HIS HEAD STICKING OUT OF THE TOP, AND FIRMLY SECURED BY THE NECK. HIS FEET WOULD REST ON A WOODEN BOARD

EACH DAY THE BOARD WOULD BE SLIGHTLY LOWERED SO THAT THE VICTIM HAD TO STAND ON TIP TOE TO RELIEVE THE STRAIN ON HIS THROAT. BY THE SEVENTH OR EIGHTH DAY, NO LONGER ABLE TO REACH THE BOARD, THE VICTIM'S NECK WOULD BREAK.

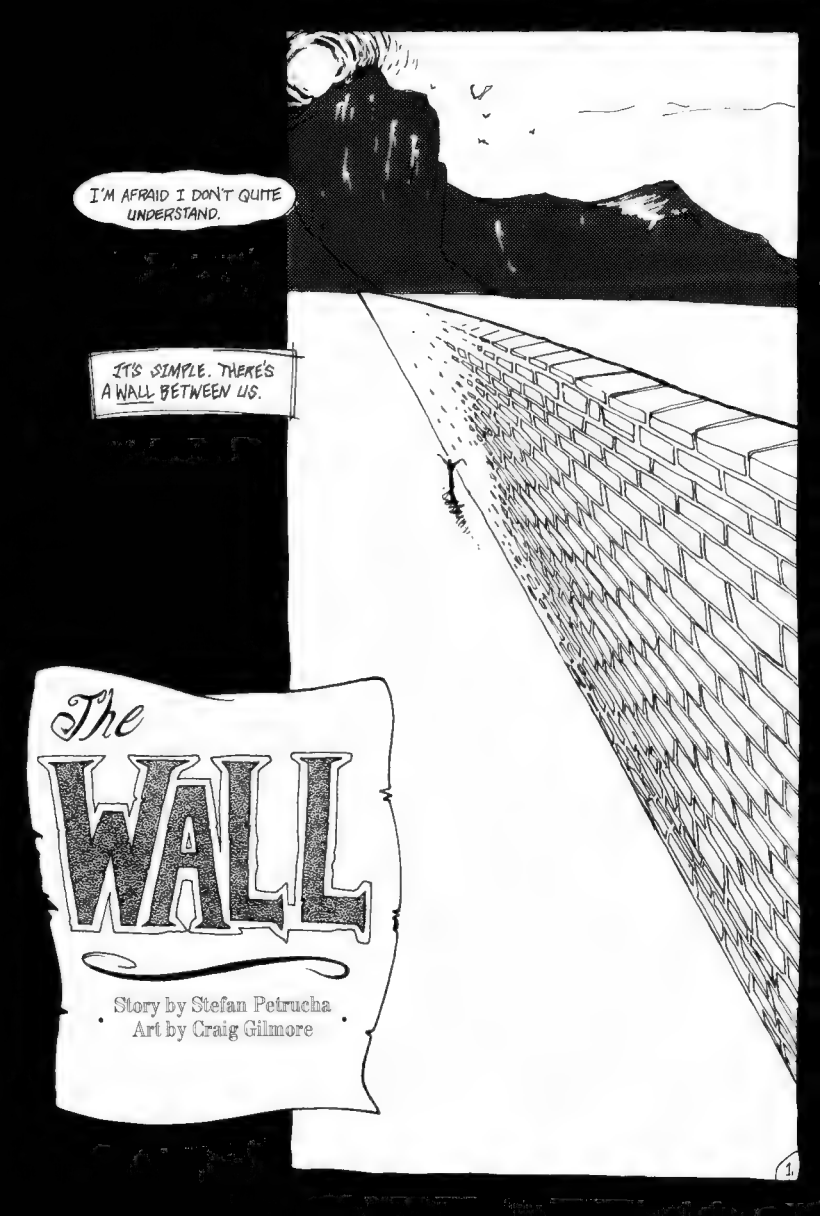
THE **KAPAS** WOULD ALWAYS BE SURROUNDED BY VENDORS WHOSE CUSTOM WAS INCREASED BY THOSE WHO CAME TO HEAR THE GROANS AND SEE THE PROLONGED AGONY OF THE CONDEMNED MAN.

IN **AMERICA** DURING THE TIME OF SLAVERY A MAN COULD BE PUNISHED BY BEING MADE TO WEAR A SPIKED METAL COLLAR.

OF THE EIGHT LONG SPIKES RADIATING FROM THE COLLAR FOUR POINTED DOWNWARDS AND FOUR UPWARDS, AND EACH CURVED BACK TOWARDS THE WEARER STOPPING ONLY INCHES AWAY FROM HIS BODY.

AS LONG AS HE WORE THIS DEVICE THE VICTIM COULD NOT SLEEP AND, EXHAUSTED AS HE MAY BE, COULD NOT RELAX HIS HEAD OR THE SPIKES WOULD EMBED THEMSELVES IN HIS CHEST OR FACE, ETC.

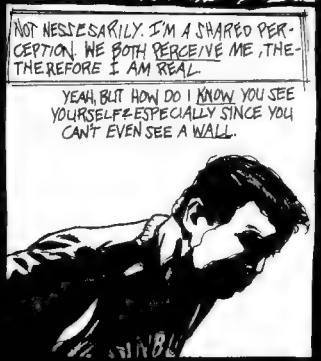
HAVE A NICE DAY.

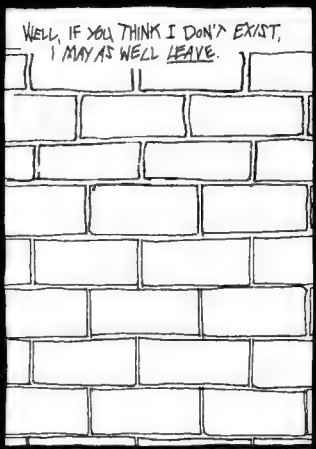

I'M AFRAID I DON'T QUITE UNDERSTAND.
IT'S SIMPLE. THERE'S A WALL BETWEEN US.
The
WALL
Story by Stefan Petrucha
Art by Craig Gilmore
1

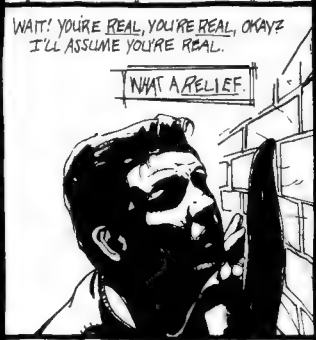
A WALL?
YEAH, A BIG ONE.
WHAT EVIDENCE DO YOU HAVE OF THIS WALL'S EXISTENCE?
WELL, FOR ONE THING, IT'S STARING ME IN THE FACE.
THEN YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT A PHYSICAL WALL.

YEP. YOU SURE YOU DON'T SEE IT?
ARE YOU SURE YOU DOE YOU COULD BE IMAGINING IT.

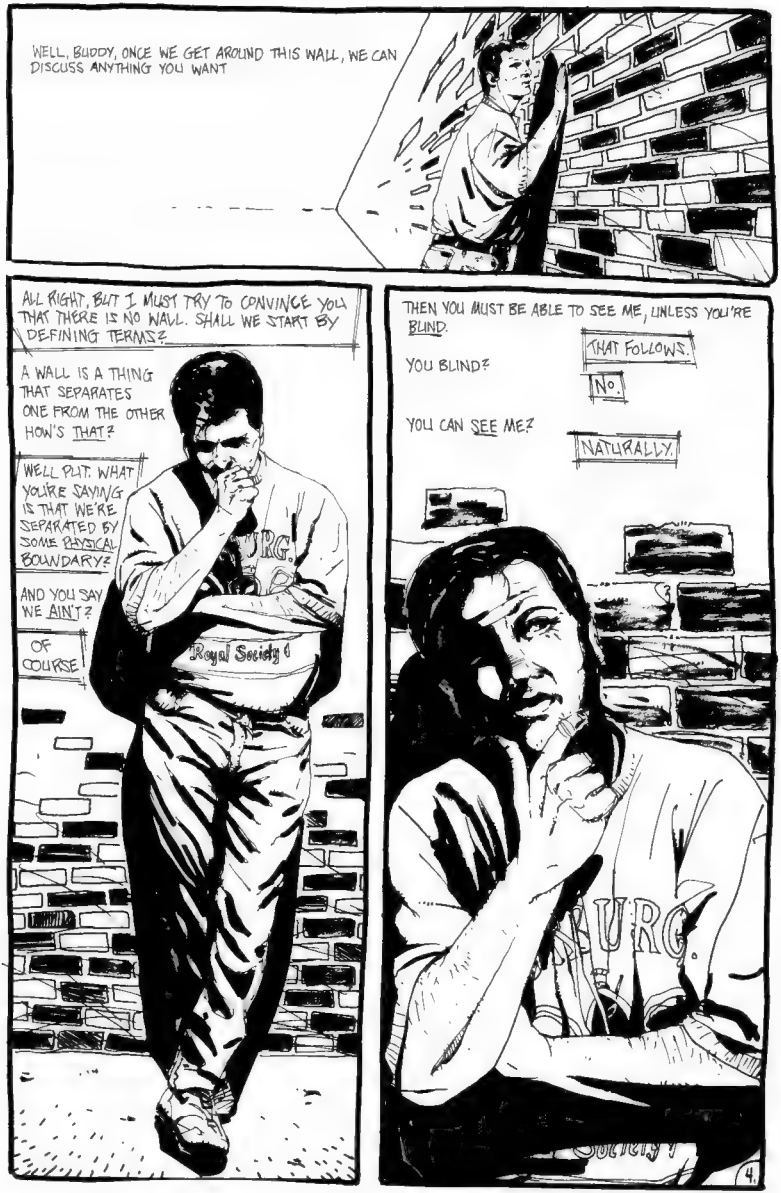
YEAH, BUT THEN YOU MIGHT NOT BE REAL EITHER.


NOT NESSESARILY. I'M A SHARED PERCEPTION. WE BOTH PERCEIVE ME, THETHEREFORE I AM REAL.
YEAH, BUT HOW DO I KNOW YOU SEE YOURSELFE-ESPECIALLY SINCE YOU CAN'T EVEN SEE A WALL.

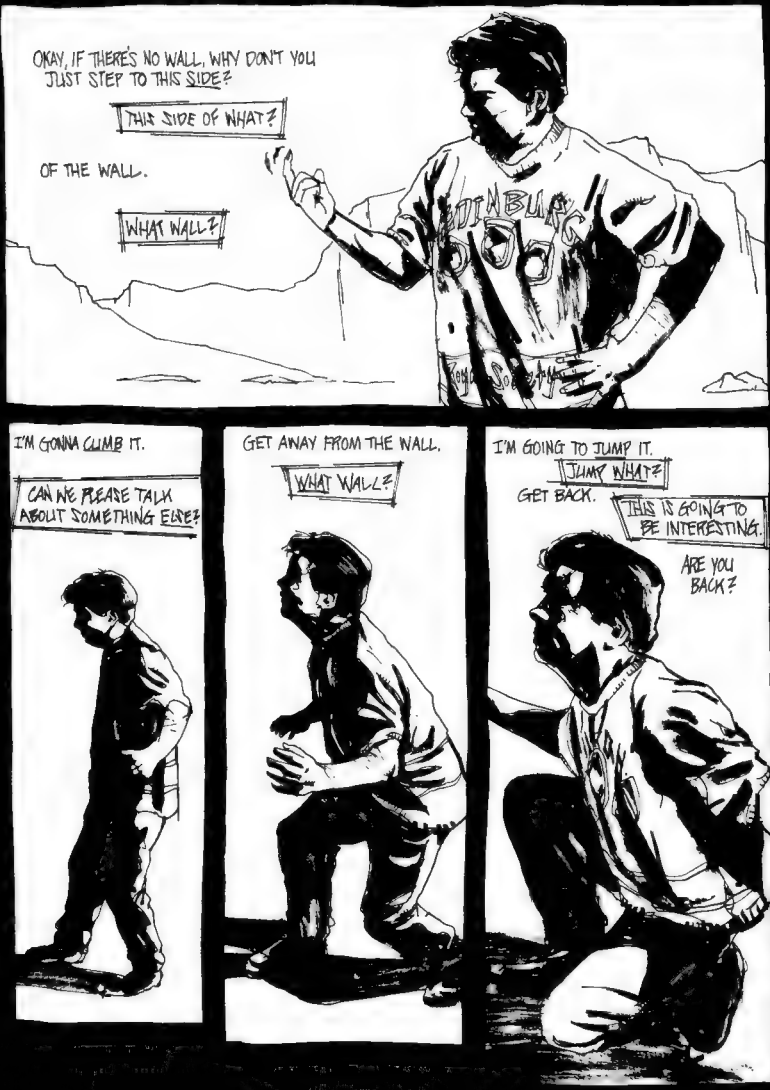

WELL, IF YOU THINK I DON'T EXIST, I MAY AS WELL LEAVE.

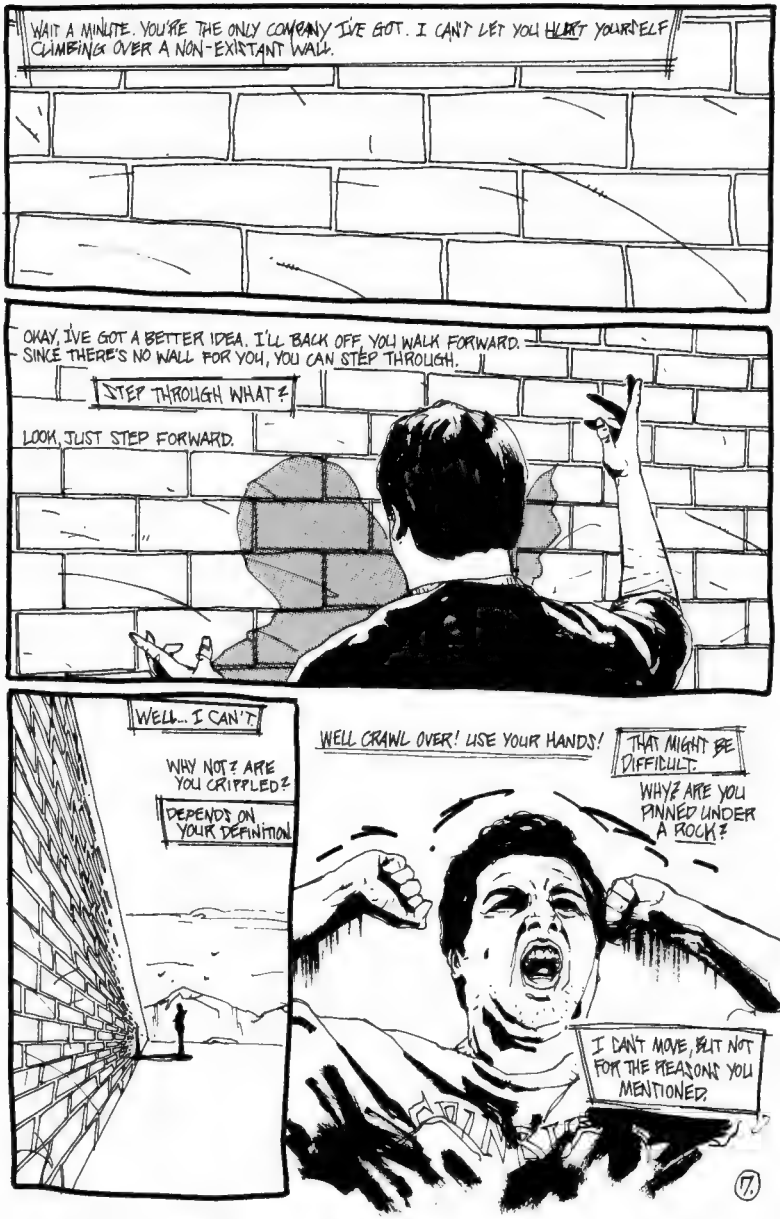

WAIT! YOU'RE REAL, YOU'RE REAL, OKAY? I'LL ASSUME YOU'RE REAL.
WHAT A RELIEF.

NOW, I'VE JUST GOT TO MAKE YOU SEE THE WALL, SO, TOGETHER, WE CAN GET AROUND IT.
I DON'T SEE WHY YOU KEEP GOING ON ABOUT THIS WALL THING. THERE'S A WORLD OF OTHER SUBJECTS WE COULD DISCUSS. IT'S BEEN VERY LONELY.

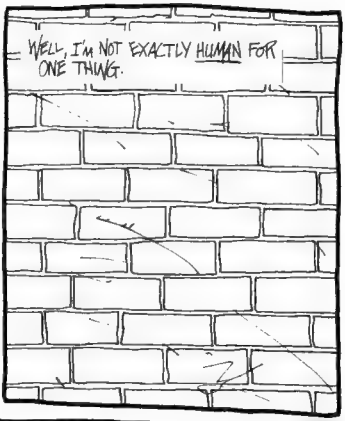

WELL, BUDDY, ONCE WE GET AROUND THIS WALL, WE CAN DISCUSS ANYTHING YOU WANT
ALL RIGHT, BUT I MUST TRY TO CONVINCE YOU THAT THERE IS NO WALL. SHALL WE START BY DEFINING TERMS?
A WALL IS A THING THAT SEPARATES ONE FROM THE OTHER HOW'S THAT?
WELL PUT, WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS THAT WE'RE SEPARATED BY SOME PHYSICAL BOUNDARY?
AND YOU SAY WE AIN'T?
OF COURSE
Royal Society
THEN YOU MUST BE ABLE TO SEE ME, UNLESS YOU'RE BLIND.
YOU BLIND?
THAT FOLLOWS.
NO.
YOU CAN SEE ME?
NATURALLY.
4

HOW MANY FINGERS AM I HOLDING UP?
ONE. SORRY IF I'VE OFFENDED YOU.
!
NEVER MIND. YOU CAN SEE ME.
MARVELOUS. THEN, LOGICALLY, THERE IS NO WALL AND WE CAN GET ON TO A DISCUSSION OF GOOD AND EVIL. IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I'VE ARGUED PLATO.
I STILL SEE THE WALL
IGNORE IT.
MAYBE IT'LL GO AWAY.
BUT THERE'S A WALL BETWEEN US!
THERE'S A WALL BETWEEN YOU AND ME, IF ANY, NOT BETWEEN ME AND YOU
A ONE WAY WALL?
INTRIGUING, ISN'T IT?


OKAY, IF THERE'S NO WALL, WHY DON'T YOU JUST STEP TO THIS SIDE?
THIS SIDE OF WHAT?
OF THE WALL.
WHAT WALL?
I'M GONNA CLIMB IT.
CAN WE PLEASE TALK ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE?
GET AWAY FROM THE WALL.
WHAT WALL?
I'M GOING TO JUMP IT.
JUMP WHAT?
GET BACK.
THIS IS GOING TO BE INTERESTING.
ARE YOU BACK?


WAIT A MINUTE. YOU'RE THE ONLY COMPANY I'VE GOT. I CAN'T LET YOU HURT YOURSELF CLIMBING OVER A NON-EXISTANT WALL.
OKAY, I'VE GOT A BETTER IDEA. I'LL BACK OFF, YOU WALK FORWARD. SINCE THERE'S NO WALL FOR YOU, YOU CAN STEP THROUGH.
STEP THROUGH WHAT?
LOOK, JUST STEP FORWARD.
WELL... I CAN'T
WHY NOT? ARE YOU CRIPPLED?
DEPENDS ON YOUR DEFINITION.
WELL CRAWL OVER! USE YOUR HANDS!
THAT MIGHT BE DIFFICULT.
WHY? ARE YOU PINNED UNDER A ROCK?
I CAN'T MOVE, BUT NOT FOR THE REASONS YOU MENTIONED.

HUH? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?


WELL, I'M NOT EXACTLY HUMAN FOR ONE THING.

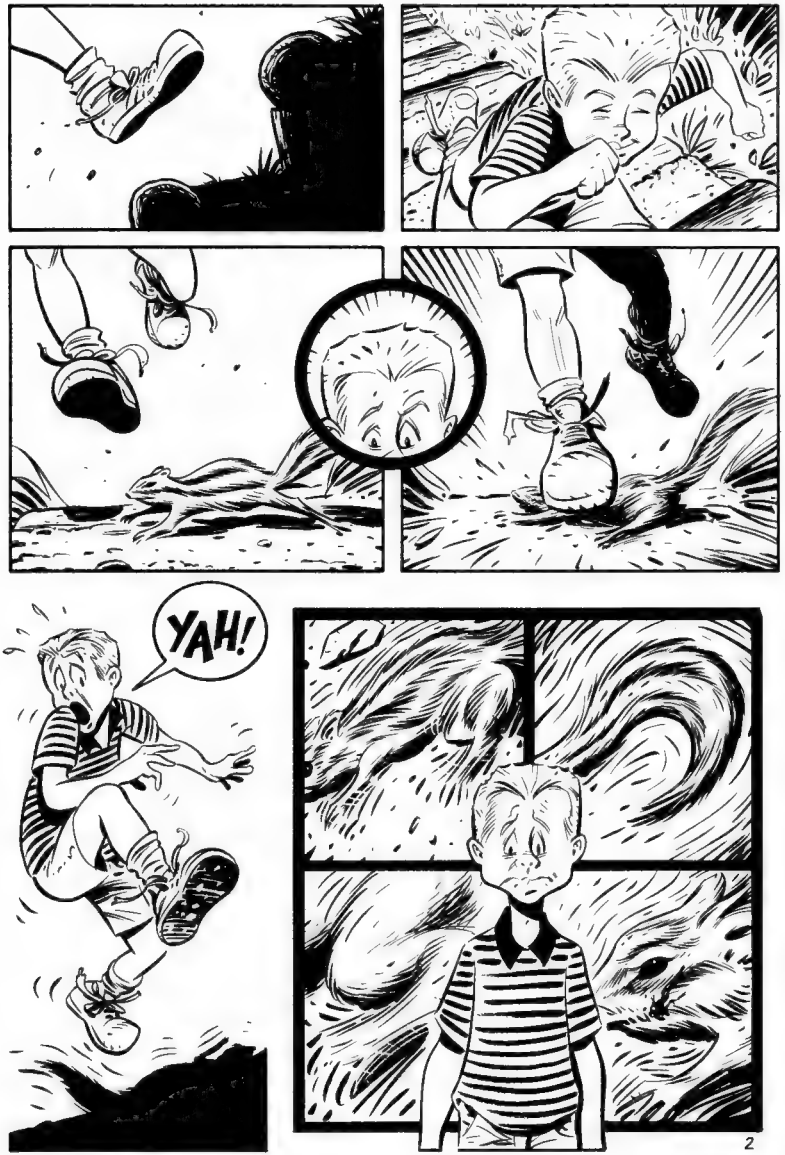
NOT HUMAN... YOU'RE NOT.... WAIT A MINUTE....
IT GETS VERY LONELY WITH NO ONE TO TALK TO.

YOU ARE THE WALL! YOU'RE THE GODDAMN WALL!
NO I'M NOT. A WALL SEPARATES THINGS. I'M NOT SEPARATING ANYTHING. YOU KNOW WHAT'S ON THE OTHER SIDE OF ME? NOTHING. MUD, SLIME, SNAKES. YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO GO THERE. SO I'M NOT SEPARATING ANYTHING, SO I'M NOT A WALL.

ALL THIS TIME, I'VE BEEN TALKING TO A WALL.
I'M A VERY NICE WALL.
END.

SPASTIC CHIPMUNK

An Accidental Tale of Guilt and Guile


YAH!

Hey, guys! C'mere!
You gotta see this!
I found a dead chipmunk!
C'mon!
C'mon!
It's right up here!

Soon, at the scene of the crime...
Yaroo!
ALL RIGHT, WHAT HAPPENED HERE?!
Gross...
Well, I was running up to the cabin to get my favorite bat and when I got to the top of the stairs this little chipmonk was just laying there... dead."
There was a rock with blood on it right next to him.
I think someone maybe threw the rock at him.
WHERE'S THE ROCK?
I tossed it into the grass over there.
Hmmm.
I SEE.
IF I EVER CATCH ANY ONE OF YOU HARMING ANY ANIMAL IN ANY WAY...
...I'LL PERSONALLY TAN YOUR HIDE, BUT GOOD!
NOW GIVE THE LITTLE CRITTER A PROPER BURIAL.
AND BE CAREFUL NOT TO TOUCH IT.

About a year later...
...then Jerry smacked the possum with his bat!
It was the coolest!
THAT'S ENOUGH, DEAR.
Hey...
...D'you remember when we were on vacation and I found that dead chipmunk?
Yeah.
Well, no one threw a rock at it. I made that up.
I accidentally stepped on it when I was running up the steps.
Yeah, right!
No, really! It was spazzing out like crazy!
Uh-huh.
Mom, you believe me, don't you?!
YES, DEAR.
OF COURSE I DO.
GOOD NIGHT, BOYS.
SLEEP TIGHT.
The End

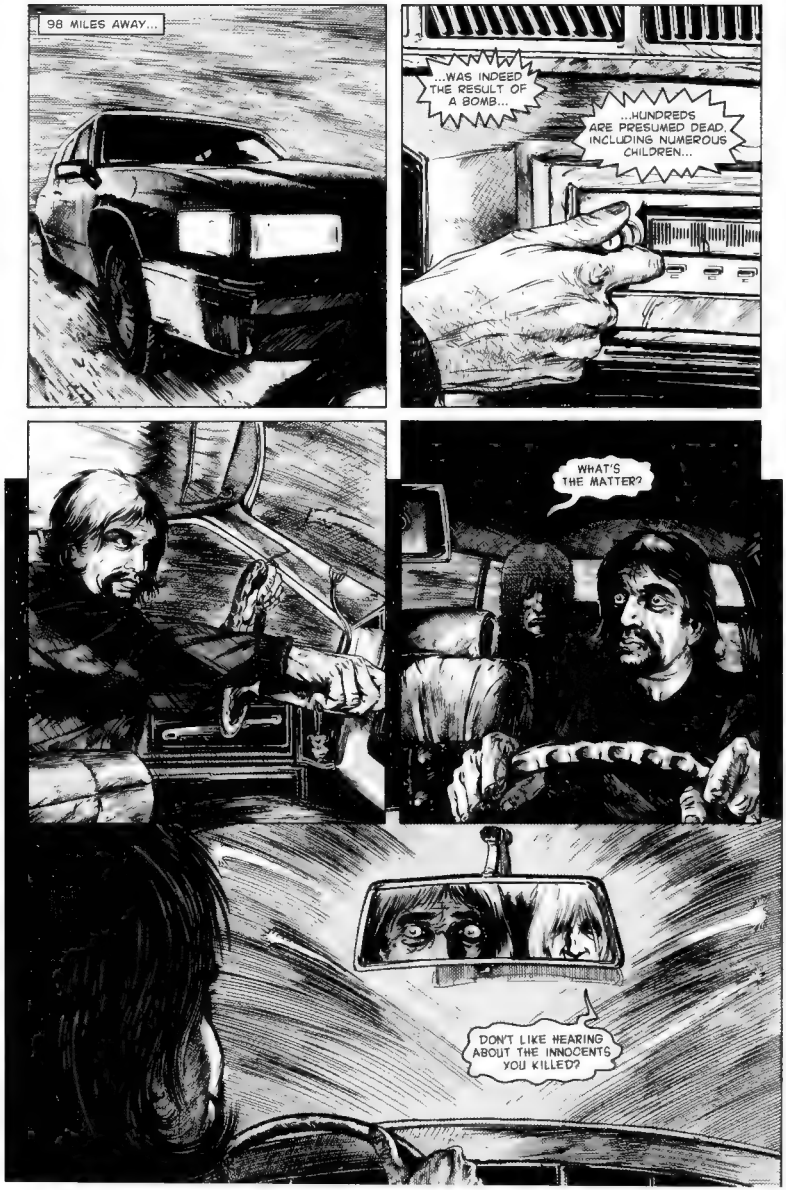
SPASTIC CHIPMUNK is the first in a series of CHIPMUNK STORIES by PAUL FRICKE

KILROY
WAS
IS
HERE
KRA-KOOM

WITHOUT REASON

HEY, BUDDY, I'M HERE TO GETCHA OUT OF HERE
COME ON, GUY, YOU BETTER LET ME TAKE THE CHILD NOW WE'RE HERE TO HELP.
WHY?
I WISH I KNEW

TAKE 'EM BACK TO THE STATION. THEY'LL NEED TO NOTIFY THE NEXT OF KIN.
DAMN. IT JUST DOESN'T MAKE SENSE. THAT KID NEVER HURT ANYONE.
NOW LET'S GET YOU OUTTA HERE, PAL.
DAMN THIS JOB.


98 MILES AWAY...
...WAS INDEED THE RESULT OF A BOMB...
...HUNDREDS ARE PRESUMED DEAD, INCLUDING NUMEROUS CHILDREN...
WHAT'S THE MATTER?
DON'T LIKE HEARING ABOUT THE INNOCENTS YOU KILLED?

YOU KNOW, I COULD HELP YOU. I COULD EVEN *KILL* YOU. BUT I'M NOT GOING TO DO EITHER
WHY?/ WHY *THERE*?/ WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?/ WHAT ABOUT ALL THE INNOCENT?/ DID THEY REALLY DESERVE TO *DIE*?/
FOR THE REVOLUTION... FOR OUR RIGHTS FOR AMERICA
WHAT ABOUT THE RIGHTS OF THOSE YOU MURDERED?
CIVILIANS *ALWAYS* DIE IN WAR

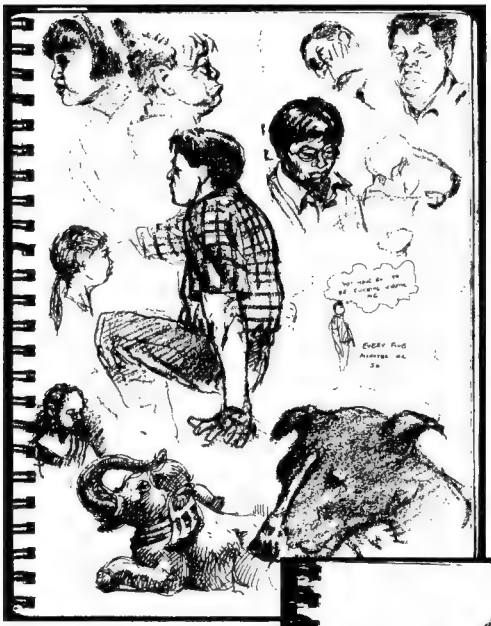
SO WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO? KILL ME?
NO, YOU DON'T DESERVE TO GET OFF THAT EASY.
"NO, INSTEAD OF DEATH YOU'LL FEEL WHAT EVERYONE YOU KILLED FELT."
"YOU'LL FEEL THEIR EMOTIONS... THEIR LIVES ...THEIR DEATHS."
"FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE THEY WILL BE WITH YOU IN YOUR WAKING HOURS AND IN YOUR DREAMTIME."
"IN SHORT, YOUR LIFE WILL BE A LIVING HELL."

THIS IS YOUR PUNISHMENT
MAY GOD HAVE MERCY ON YOUR SOUL
VWEEEEEE
YOUR RIDE'S HERE
THIS STORY IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORIES OF THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN THE OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING ON APRIL 19, 1995.

"Nature of Reality"
by Zander Cannon

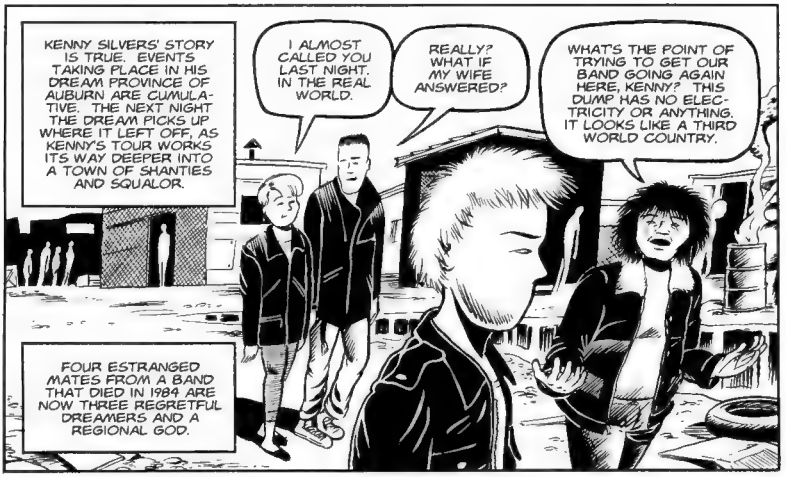
HARRISON BLESSER HADN'T REALIZED HE WAS SLEEPING, BUT NONETHELESS HE AWOKE -- AND DISCOVERED WHAT VERY FEW PEOPLE KNOW...
THIS IS AN UNBELIEVABLE DISCOVERY, THOUGHT HARRISON.
I'VE FOUND THE ACTUAL NATURE OF REALITY.
... MY GOD...
THAT EVERYTHING HE HAD CONSIDERED "REALITY" FOR HIS ENTIRE LIFE WAS A DREAM.
EVERY PERSON WHO EXISTS LIVES HIS OR HER LIFE IN HIS OR HER HEAD WHILE FLOATING 3 INCHES OFF THE FLOOR IN A CHEESY NIGHTCLUB.
AND-- AND EACH OF THESE PEOPLE-- IS CREATING AN ENTIRE UNIVERSE... TO TALK TO ANY ONE OF THEM WOULD BE LIKE CONTACTING ANOTHER WORLD.
... MM-HM. YES... OH, OH -- YES... OH
MISS?
I'VE IMAGINED MY WHOLE LIFE THOUGHT HARRISON
EVERYTHING I THOUGHT WAS REAL. MY JOB... ALL MY ACCOMPLISHMENTS... EVERY SUCCESS EVERY FAILURE...
MMM... I... I MEAN D-DO YOU REALIZE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF... OF... OF THIS...
UH?
I MEAN
I'M NOT REALLY MARRIED..
ONLY THIS DANCE FLOOR AND THESE DREAMING PEOPLE AND THAT DISCO BALL REALLY EXIST...
LISTEN PAL...
DO YOU MIND?
I'M NOT A CITIZEN OF ANY COUNTRY.
HE ALONE, OF ALL THE PEOPLE HE KNEW, ACTUALLY EXISTED... HE ALONE KNEW THE NATURE OF HIS OWN EXISTENCE...
HOW RUDE.
AND HARRISON WENT BACK TO SLEEP, HOPING, AS WE ALL DO, THAT HE CAN GO BACK INTO THE SAME DREAM HE HAD BEFORE...
the end

Steve Lieber Sketchbook



THE STEVEN LIEBER
SKETCHBOOK MINI
19
95

COMPLIMENTS
OF MARC
SVEN LICHEN
320 E. LIBERTY BOX 326
ANN ARBOR, MI 48104-2110
72674.2012@COMPUSERVE.COM.
THEY'RE DETECTIVES...


KENNY SILVERS' STORY IS TRUE. EVENTS TAKING PLACE IN HIS DREAM PROVINCE OF AUBURN ARE CUMULATIVE. THE NEXT NIGHT THE DREAM PICKS UP WHERE IT LEFT OFF, AS KENNY'S TOUR WORKS ITS WAY DEEPER INTO A TOWN OF SHANTIES AND SQUALOR.
I ALMOST CALLED YOU LAST NIGHT. IN THE REAL WORLD.
REALLY? WHAT IF MY WIFE ANSWERED?
WHAT'S THE POINT OF TRYING TO GET OUR BAND GOING AGAIN HERE, KENNY? THIS DUMP HAS NO ELECTRICITY OR ANYTHING. IT LOOKS LIKE A THIRD WORLD COUNTRY.
FOUR ESTRANGED MATES FROM A BAND THAT DIED IN 1984 ARE NOW THREE REGRETFUL DREAMERS AND A REGIONAL GOD.

NO REGRETS {3} H eyes

TRUE. BUT FURTHER BACK IT LOOKED LIKE APOCALYPTIC RUINS, REMEMBER? THE FARTHER WE GO AHEAD THE LONGER MY WORKERS HAVE BEEN AT IT.
THE BAND WILL CREATE THE INDUSTRY, AND THE INDUSTRY WILL CREATE THE BAND.
JUST TALK LIKE A NORMAL PERSON. JEEZ.
THE IDEA OF THE BAND IS DRAWING MORE AND MORE OF THEM HERE. THESE DREAMERS POSSESS THE ENGINEERING SKILLS OF MODERN MAN. WITH THEIR SHEER NUMBERS AND A LITTLE TIME, AN ENTIRE CITY WILL BE BUILT, JUST FOR US.
YES, LITTLE CARL.
WE'VE FINISHED THE CIGARETTES, KENNY.
AH. SEE WHAT I MEAN?
I'VE GOT SOMEONE ELSE WORKING ON BEER.

WITH THOSE WORDS, CIGARETTES AND BEER, CARL MCGOWAN BREAKS OUT IN A COLD SWEAT. HE WAS HOPING THIS FANTASY KINGDOM WOULD BE FREE OF DRUGS OR STIMULANTS, AND HE WOULD BE FORCED TO GO CLEAN.
IF IT'S NOT ONE VICE IT'S ANOTHER. ANYTHING BUT SIMPLY LIVING.
FOR THAT, HE HAS TO SEARCH HIS MEMORY BACK TO THE AGE OF SEVENTEEN. NO ONE BELIEVES HE USED TO RUN TRACK IN HIGH SCHOOL.
BUT RUNNING WAS ONLY A FOCAL POINT FOR HIS INSATIABLE CRAVING, WHICH SPREAD LIKE A VIRUS THROUGH THE WAITING VICES OF HUMANITY.
DRUG INDUCED WEIGHT LOSS.
CHAIN SMOKING.
COCAINE FLINGS.
BEER BINGING.
STEROID WEIGHT TRAINING.
OVER-EATING.
CRASH FASTING.
A ROULETTE OF LIGHTWEIGHT VICES UNTIL MAY 6TH, 1984 . . .
HE CALLS THAT DATE HIS "SMACK BIRTHDAY." HE ONLY SNORTED IT, BUT IT GAVE HIM THE SAME EUPHORIA HE USED TO FEEL WHEN RUNNING.
IT DIDN'T HELP HIS DRUMMING ANY, THOUGH. THAT DAY ENDED UP BEING THE LAST REHEARSAL FOR NO REGRETS, AND HE SAW THE BAND'S BREAK UP AS HIS RESPONSIBILITY.
FOR THAT REASON HE SWORE HE WOULD NEVER MAINLINE THE STUFF.
WHY DO THE DREAMERS OBEY YOU? WHAT'S IN IT FOR THEM?
A PLEASANT DREAM, OF COURSE!

AFTER THEY PROVIDE SOME WORK, THEY CONTINUE ON INTO THE DREAM PLANES. I GUIDE THEM INTO A NICE DREAM, SO THEY'RE HAPPY TO COME BACK THE NEXT NIGHT.
THEN WHY SHOULD WE BOTHER WITH ALL THIS BUILDING AND WAITING?
LET'S JUST GO STRAIGHT INTO A NICE DREAM, WHERE WE HAVE OUR BAND AND I'M HEALTHY AND EVERYTHING'S COOL.
'BECAUSE YOU NEED MY GUIDANCE, MCGOWAN! YOU CAN'T JUST GO RUNNING BLINDLY INTO THEM!'
BUT HE DOES. HE RUNS WITH MORE EARNEST THAN HE HAS IN YEARS.
HE REACHES THE END, AND GLIDES INTO A DREAM.
HE'S RUNNING ALONG THE AMERICAN RIVER.
HE'S SO DAMNED HEALTHY!
A SINEWY ANIMAL.
'HE'LL SEE,' KENNY MURMURS.

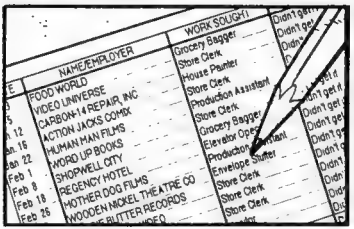
SUDDENLY, THE TRAIL TURNS DARK. THE DREAM TURNS DARK.
PAINFUL VOMITING. SOMETHING'S MISSING.
A CHEMICAL. A VICE.
CARL WAKES.
HIS SHIFT AT THE CAR WASH IS FILLED WITH PANIC AND SECRETED HALF-PINTS OF CHEAP VODKA.
THESE DREAMS ARE SCARING HIM. HE FEELS OUT OF CONTROL. HE FINDS HIMSELF HEADING TO BRUNEMIER'S HOUSE.
AFFECTIONATELY KNOWN AS 'SPOONEMIER.'
THE DREAM AGAIN PICKS UP WHERE IT LEFT OFF.
I CAN SEE THEM! THE NIGHTMARES!
LOOK! THERE. AND THERE AND THERE.
CARL!
DON'T YOU SEE 'EM, KENNY?
YOU'RE ON SMACK!
YES! OH, YES! YUM YUM!

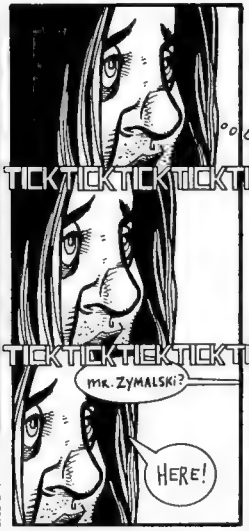
AND I'M NOT ASLEEP.
WHAT?!?
I'M AWAKE, ON THE SMACK, BUT I CAME BACK HERE, LIKE I WAS SLEEPING.
NO WAY, MAN.
OH, YES!!!
CARL GRABS KENNY'S HAND TIGHTLY, AND KENNY SEES IT, TOO. THE WALL OF NIGHTMARES.
BEFORE, HE SAW ONLY GLIMMERS OF NICE DREAMS, WHICH HE GUIDED THE DREAMERS TOWARDS. NOW, HE SEES SPECIFIC DARK BLOTS OF HORROR.
THERE ARE NOW THOUSANDS OF DREAMERS PASSING THROUGH AUBURN TO WORK. HERE AT THE EXIT, THEY SEEK A GOOD DREAM AND REST.
I CAN MAKE THEM WORK FASTER...
KENNY GRABS A DREAMER FROM THE FLOW, AND SHOVES HER FACE INTO ONE OF THE BLACK VOIDS.
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, AUBURN WILL NOW MOVE INTO THE 20TH CENTURY!
THE WOMAN FLAILS AS IF BEING DROWNED. HER SILENT SCREAM LOST IN THE UNKNOWN NIGHTMARE.
YOUR INCENTIVE PLAN IS NOW BACKED BY A PENALTY SYSTEM!

continued...

You're Lying To Me

STORY AND ART BY DEAN HASPIEL





TICKTICKTICKTICKTICKTICKTICKTICKTICK
TICKTICKTICKTICKTICKTICKTICKTICKTICK

ARE YOU SURE YOU GUYS HAVE TO GO SO SOON?
YEAH.. WE'D LOVE TO STAY, BUT I HAVE TO GET UP EARLY.
ME, TOO. . THANKS FOR THE MOVIE THOUGH.
2 Conversations
I THOUGHT THEY'D NEVER LEAVE.
CLICK
A Shades of Gray SHORT STORY
I THOUGHT WE'D NEVER GET OUTTA THERE
I KNOW
By Jimmy Gownley
Copyright 1996
WALK ME HOME?
SURE
OKAY, MISTER .. FOLLOW ME I'VE GOT A SURPRISE FOR YOU OUT BACK

OKAY, FREDDY..
WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?
MAN YOU'RE GOOD I'M THINKING ABOUT PETER AND MARIE
WHAT ABOUT?
THEIR RELATIONSHIP
AND..
IT FREAKS ME OUT!
WOW! A GUY WHO'S FREAKED OUT BY RELATIONSHIPS. QUICK CALL RIPLEY'S! THIS MUST BE A FIRST!
BUT YEAH...

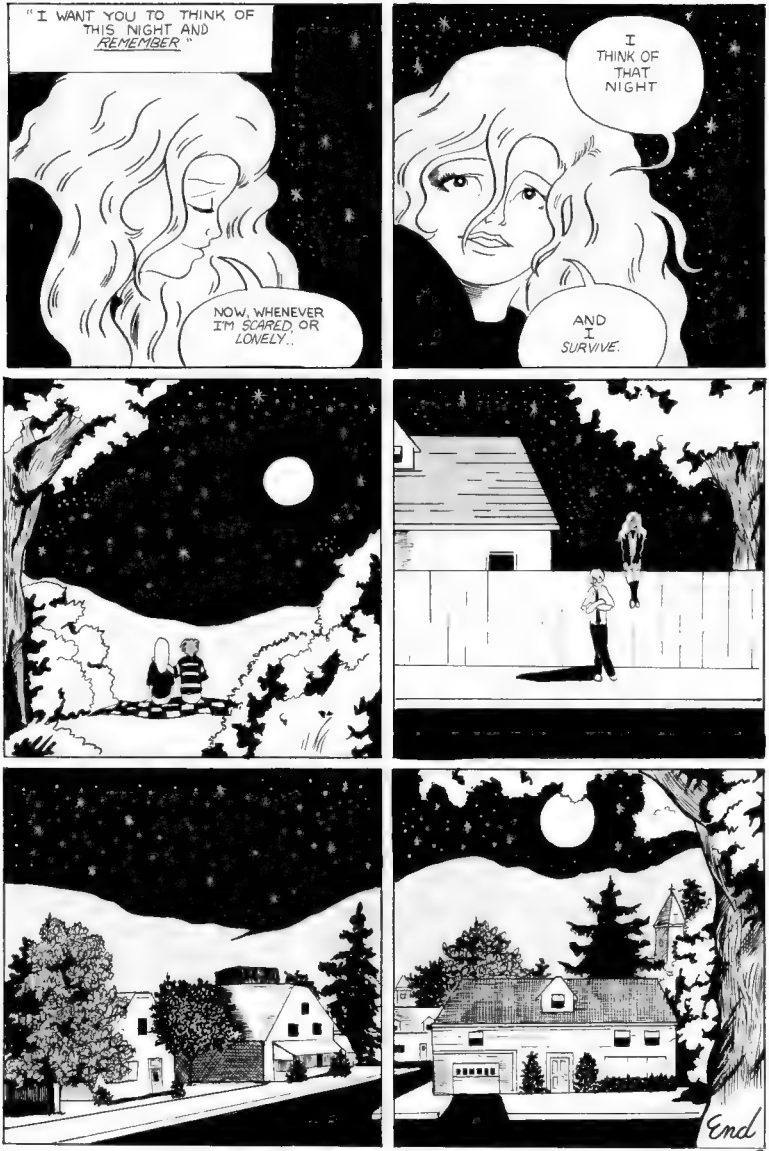
"IT'S LIKE THERE'S A MARIE, AND A PETER, TWO INDIVIDUALS, BUT WHEN THEY'RE TOGETHER"
HEY!
"IT'S LIKE THERE'S THIS THIRD PERSON WHO ONLY EXISTS WHEN THEIR TOGETHER"
ALRIGHT! A MOONLIGHT PICNIC!
GRAPES, BREAD, CHEESE, LUNCH MEAT, CAKE
THIS IS GREAT!
AND WHAT'S THIS?
"CHAMPANO SPARKLING GRAPE JUICE"
OF COURSE, NOTHING BUT THE FINEST!
Champano SPARKLING Grape Juice
I SHOULD WARN YOU, TWO OF THESE AN' I START DISCUSSING THE FREUDIAN SYMBOLISM IN "E.T."
HA HA
I HOPE THIS DOESN'T SEEM CORNY OR ANYTHING I JUST WANTED TO DO SOMETHING SPECIAL.
CAUSE I KNOW THINGS GET WEIRD SOMETIMES YOU KNOW... BETWEEN US?
SO I WANT YOU TO KNOW.
3

"JUST HOW MUCH I CARE ABOUT YOU."
SO. YOU'RE PRETTY MUCH ANTI-RELATIONSHIP?
I DIDN'T SAY THAT
MIGHT AS WELL HAVE.
IS IT 'CAUSE YOUR PARENTS SPLIT UP?
WHAT ARE YOU MY ANALYST NOW?
JUST CALL ME SIGMOND!
AS IN "FREUD" OR "THE SEAMONSTER"?
HAR HAR
C'MON, FREDDY SERIOUSLY, WHAT MAKES YOU SAY THAT?
IT JUST SEEMS TO ME LIKE YOU'RE STILL PRETTY BROKEN UP ABOUT IT... LIKE YOU CAN'T PUT IT BEHIND YOU.
I DON'T KNOW. MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT. I GUESS I DO DWELL ON IT... AND WHEN I SEE PETER AND MARIE, I JUST WANT TO YELL
"YOU WON'T BE THIS HAPPY FOREVER YOU KNOW. SOMEDAY YOU'LL HAVE TO BE ALONE. THEN WHAT?

"SIGH"
WHEN I WAS LITTLE, I WAS TERRIFIED OF THE DARK.
EVEN A NIGHT-LIGHT WASN'T ENOUGH. MAYBE I JUST HAD AN OVER-ACTIVE IMAGINATION
BUT I HAD TO HAVE THE BIGGEST LIGHT ON, OR I COULDN'T SLEEP.
"EVEN THOUGH NO ONE KNEW, I WAS EMBARASSED, SO I DECIDED I WAS GONNA DO IT"
"I'D SPEND THE NIGHT ALL ALONE IN THE DARK, CONFRONTING MY FEARS
TOYS
"IT WAS THE LONGEST NIGHT OF MY LIFE. THE CLOCK'S TICKING SOMEHOW.. I DON'T KNOW... DEEPENED THE SILENCE"
"AT FIRST, MY WHOLE BODY WAS SUPER CHARGED, EVERY LITTLE NOISE SENT LIGHTNING THROUGH MY NERVES. BUT... GRADUALLY..."
"... GRADUALLY I GOT LESS SCARED, MY EYES GOT HEAVY, AND I COULD FINALLY FEEL MY BODY STOP FIGHTING. AND I SLEPT"
'WHEN I WOKE UP THAT MORNING, I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT."

"IT WAS THE GREATEST MOMENT OF MY LIFE"
SO. WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?
MMM ABOUT US
WHAT ABOUT US?
WELL. WE WENT OUT FOR A WHILE. THEN WE BROKE UP FOR A WHILE
I MEAN. FOR THE VAST MAJORITY OF MY LIFE, WE HAVEN'T BEEN TOGETHER..
BUT WHEN WE BROKE UP. I JUST COULDNT GO BACK TO BEING LIKE I WAS BEFORE.
IT'S NOT LIKE I WAS LONELY.
IT'S NOT EVEN LIKE I WASN'T MYSELF.
IT WAS WEIRD..
WHEN I'D SIT AND THINK OF YOU, I'D REMEMBER THAT DAY YOU CAME OVER AND WE LOOKED THROUGH ALL MY SCRAP BOOKS AN' STUFF...
AN' I TOLD YOU ALL ABOUT WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL AN' ALL..
IT WAS A PERFECT DAY.

SO I STARTED THINKING WHAT WERE YOU THINKING ABOUT?
WHAT MOMENTS DID YOU REMEMBER
AND THAT'S WHAT TONIGHT IS ALL ABOUT.
A NIGHT FOR YOU.
A PERFECT NIGHT
I MEAN. . I KNOW. . WE BOTH KNOW, IT CAN'T BE LIKE THIS FOREVER
THEY'LL PROBABLY BE A DAY WHEN WE'RE NOT TOGETHER
WELL BE AT DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OR DIFFERENT JOBS. . I HOPE IT DOESN'T HAPPEN
BUT IF IT DOES.


"I WANT YOU TO THINK OF THIS NIGHT AND REMEMBER."
NOW, WHENEVER I'M SCARED OR LONELY..
I THINK OF THAT NIGHT
AND I SURVIVE.
End

THE FIRST COMIC BOOK ABOUT YOU.

"RECOMMENDED"
DAVE SIM

" EVOKES THE FINEST ELEMENTS OF FICTION WRITING "
STEVE GINSBERG
COMICS BUYERS GUIDE

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JOE ZABEL
KNOWN ASSOCIATES, AMERICAN SPLENDOR

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WILLIAM HUGHES
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ADVANCE COMICS.

Shades of Gray

COMICS AND STORIES

BACK ISSUES(#'S 5-10) ARE AVAILABLE FOR $2.50 EA.
OR GET STARTED RIGHT WITH "DAYS TO REMEMBER", THE TRADE PAPERBACK WHICH COLLECTS THE FIRST FOUR HARD-TO-FIND ISSUES $8.95+$2.00 POSTAGE

WRITE TO LADY LUCK LTD. 219 A STREET GIRARDVILLE PA 17935

MY MEMORY IS AN ODD THING
SO MANY BITS AND PIECES HAVE FALLEN OFF THAT I CAN HARDLY REMEMBER MY CHILDHOOD
THERE'S REALLY ONLY ONE INCIDENT THAT STILL SHINES BRIGHTLY IN MY MIND.
WAS THREE OR FOUR
WE WERE LIVING IN A BIG, OLD HOUSE IN CALIFORNIA AND I HAD MY OWN ROOM ON THE SECOND FLOOR
A B C
THE ROOM HAD A NIGHTMARE FEATURE THAT I BECAME AWARE OF LATE ONE NIGHT.
FROM MY BED I COULD LOOK OUT MY DOOR.

DOWN THE STAIRS.
THROUGH THE KITCHEN.
AND OUT THE BIG WINDOW
IN THE STRANGE LIGHT OF THAT NIGHT I COULD SEE THINGS MOVING IN THE BUSHES
HORRIBLE SHAPES.
THINGS THAT WOULD EAT A LITTLE BOY IF HE EVEN GLIMPSED THEM.
I SPENT THE NIGHT COWERING UNDER MY BLANKETS.
CERTAIN THAT IF I COULDN'T SEE THEM
THEY COULDN'T GET ME.
THE NEXT DAY I HAD MY MOTHER MOVE MY BED TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOM.
I NEVER TOLD HER WHY
IT'S THE FIRST THING I CAN REMEMBER ABOUT MY LIFE.
SHAKING WITH FEAR UNDER A WARM BLANKET
END

story and art by matthew smith

Jeffrey B. Workman
103245.3045@compuserve.com

Got it today! Your rag is the best rag around. Thanks for expanding it! I always felt like it wasn't big enough.

Another satisfied customer! Thanks, Jeffrey. Living in a vacuum like most comic creators do, we're always happy to hear from someone even if it's just a short sentence or two. Hope you check in with us again.

Edward Douglas
76453.767@compuserve.com

NEGATIVE BURN #28: First of all, I love Andrew Robinson's artwork (or rather, what little I've seen of it) because it reminds me of Richard Case (another favorite) in many ways. I know very little to nothing about what his background is or if he's done anything else for Caliber, but I was happy to see him get the lead story and the cover this issue!

First up, we have Joe Pruett's new short story character that I imagine will be taking Kilroy's place for awhile, "Dusty Star"! I love the fact that you're starting to include Western-based comics in NEGATIVE BURN now, too, to give it even more variety. I wouldn't be too surprised if Western comics are big in 1996 after the popularity of JONAH HEX, ZORRO, and James Robinson's VIGILANTE. (That reminds me....has James Robinson done anything for NEG. BURN yet?) Well, I absolutely loved this one as it had all the humor of the recent HEX series, but also reminded me of some of the British strips such as TANK GIRL or JUDGE DREDD because of Andrew's humorous artwork. I was a bit disappointed by where the story ended as it didn't really seem to be a self-contained story. If this were part of a longer story, I'd understand where it was cut-off, but otherwise, the ending was a bit of a let-down and left me wanting to see much more. I hope that Joe and Andrew plan to do more with this character (maybe even in a regular series) as I think she could prove popular!

I'm still not really understanding the point of "Mr. Mamoulian" and while "A Leg" had the charm of some of Eddie Campbell's shorts, the "punchline" just didn't have any sort of impact.

Likewise, "Alan Moore's Songbook" seems to be a struggle of futility for me, as I generally like the artists involved, but prefer Moore's writing in a story setting better than in this fashion. "Rose Madder" is no exception as I enjoy James Owen's beautiful artwork, but the poetic verse just didn't do anything for me, and I just didn't have the patience to try to understand it.

There definitely seemed to be a central theme of violence running throughout the next three stories.

Mark Verheiden's disturbing "Favorite Song" was made even more so by Ken Meyer's realistic painted artwork that definitely made my skin crawl. In some ways, it reminded me of this disturbing story I read in Marvel's BIZARRE ADVENTURES back in the 70's that was some of Steve Bissette's earliest work that had a similar effect on me. It's that really ugly feeling when you're watching something take place and you know that it's wrong and want to do something about it, but you don't. You just keep watching. I'd definitely say that this is one for the next collection as it was easily one of the most dramatic and memorable stories that I've read in NEGATIVE BURN.

On the other hand, "The Mortons" wasn't quite as effective, and Martin Conaghan's "matter-of-fact" description of the strange family down the street didn't have any sort of impact, especially after reading the previous story. There's something about Mike Perkins that I really don't like, but I can't quite put my finger on it. His art has a lot of detail, but the actual layouts aren't very interesting and don't really add to the story. Also, the attempt to mesh different styles doesn't really work in this case.

I'm usually rather blase about the sketchbooks in NB, but I really enjoyed seeing some of Ray Lago's offerings. I'm not that familiar with his non-trading card work, but I like his style that looks like it might have been etched in some element rather than drawn using traditional pen or brush. I hope that this is a precursor to seeing some of his sequential work in the future.

I've never really had a strong love for Hart Fisher's writing so I was curious to see what his story, "JuJu Eyes", could add to the issue. I was especially interested after glancing at the artwork and noticing a definite STRAY BULLETS influence. I knew that I was going into this one a bit biased against Fisher after his VEROTIKA story, but I decided to give him another chance. Surprisingly, this one actually seemed to have some moral implications even though the ending was extremely violent, the murderer seemed to have a motivation this time. This was an interesting and very powerful look at child pornography from Hart's twisted viewpoint. I doubt that it would have been as powerful if not for the violent ending, but this didn't cause as negative reaction in me as some of his previous work. Still, this was a very well-done story, second only to "Favorite Song". (Another one for the collection?)

Next up is David Moyes' "Andek, Girl Warhola" which I read twice but still didn't understand what was going on. Something about Andek sending her lover back in time to capture a dinosaur for an art piece? McLoughlin's artwork was nice in a Moebius sort of way, but it was pretty hard to follow, and I'm not quite sure what happened in the last few pages. Oh, well.

Pauls Erickson and Fricke's humorous "Pedestrian" was about as strange as the last piece they had in NB. In some ways, this reminds me of one of the INSTANT PIANO guys' rants, but being a chronic pedestrian, I can't really relate to it one bit.

I imagine that "Deadworld Chronicles" is part of the long-running Caliber series which I've never read. Because of this, the story didn't have any sort of impression on me. I understood what the creators were trying to do, but the "twist ending" has just been overdone and it doesn't have the same effect as it did back in the days of EC comics. The artwork was just okay.

Sorry, but I didn't get "Lionel's Lament" at all, so it was little more than filler to me. (Gee, just enough space for a DiGenti piece, too!<G>)

Pretty good issue, with the highlights being "Favorite Song","JuJu Eyes" and "Dusty Star" in that order.

Whew! Now THAT was a pretty thorough review, wasn't it? I didn't realize how many stories are actually appearing in each issue thanks to the new larger format until I get letters like this one. I like it!

Letters

P.O. Box 893
Acworth, GA 30101

OOPS! I MADE A MISTAKE!
Back in issue #29, I incorrectly credited Paul Erickson as the writer of "Paul Pry and the Plastic Cup." In actuality, Paul Fricke both WROTE and DREW the story. I publicly apologize to both Paul's for my error.

Andrew S. Troth
74663.3614@compuserve.com

For me, "Mr. Mamoulian"—which I think of as rather gloriously inscrutable, something to scratch my head over for days, pondering its absurdity—and the Erickson/Fricke pieces are the anchors which keep me coming back to NEGATIVE BURN every month regardless of whatever other stories are in there. I know I'll enjoy those two features and at least one or two of the other stories, so that makes it worth it. The rest of this issue was actually a bit less interesting than usual to me: "Dusty Star", "Andek, Girl Warhola", the sketchbook, and "Deadworld Chronicles" did nothing for me; "Juju Eyes" was shock for shock's sake alone, which I deplore; and I can't even remember "The Mortons". On the positive side, "Favorite Song" was deeply disturbing (er, in a positive way…), "Rose Madder" contained some great imagery, and "Lionel's Lament" left a lasting impression of grief and loneliness.

I'm glad you're finding something worthwhile in each issue, Andrew. As you know, "Mr. Mamoulian" is in every issue and Paul Fricke will be for the foreseeable future—sometimes working with Paul Erickson, sometimes with Len Strazewski, sometimes with Gordon Purcell, and sometimes all by his lonesome. Keep watching.

Mike Leonard
MLeon@aol.com
writer of DOORMAN

Just got a comp package in today with NB #28, some brief comments:

"Dusty Star" —this was cool. Is this her 1st appearance? I don't like traditional westerns, but you give me a western slightly off-the-wall, like Rebel Studios' GUNFIGHTERS FROM HELL, Vertigo's JONAH HEX, or Dusty, and I eat it up. Hope to see more of this character. "Favorite Song" was a nice, moody piece, as was the "Mortons." Hart Fisher's "JuJu Eyes" was in that same vein, too, but I'm not real fond of Fisher. He's a good writer, but he doesn't stretch himself beyond the splatterpunk genre—kind of like Marvel, the same thing over and over and over again. "Andek" lost me, but the art was pretty good. The "Deadworld" piece was a nice, tight EC-Comics style thing—loved it.

If you're looking for a report card, here goes:

Dusty Star: A+
Mr. Mamoulian: C
Rose Madder: B
Favorite Song: B
The Mortons: B+
Ray Lago Sketchbook: B
JuJu Eyes: C-
Andek: D
Pedestrian: C
Deadworld: A
Lionel's Lament: D

Thanks for the quick note, Mike. It seems like I've only gotten one unenthusiastic response to "Dusty Star", of which Andrew and I are grateful and pretty enthusiastic about ourselves. I can't wait to get the series out!

Jason Whitley
Scruffito@aol.com
Dear Joe,

I might have to retract some of my previous statements about violence in comics. This issue was both one of the best and most violent I've seen so far. Although the violence was disturbing in almost every case, none of the depictions of violence were as disturbing as that in "JuJu Eyes." I thought the artwork and the stories throughout the issue to be consistently original and well done. Ken Meyer Jr. has developed a wash style that is very interesting to look at, complimenting Mark Verheiden's script. Mike Perkins' and Martin Conaghan's work is growing on me. This second piece is as good if not better than "Shadow." There really are a lot of recurring themes in comics and you must see more than your fair share. I can't help but compare "Andek" to "Tensor Matrix" (from NB #26), but the "Girl Warhola's" take on the use of time travel is totally new. I'd like to see some more "Andek" stories. "Alan Moore's Songbook" was the best I've read yet. And "Lionel's Lament" is the best 'serial' in the book. I hope there are a lot more of these.

Yes, I agree that NB #28 was one of the most violent issues of this series, but I'm really not a "violence in comics" type person. I much prefer violence to be alluded to instead of actually shown. People around the Caliber offices have joked that #28 was the "death issue," which I guess it actually was. I intended to make the issue a little darker than usual since it was scheduled to come out in October (Halloween), but not until looking back over it now did I realize how dark the issue actually was.

Olav Beemer
Brugakker 36-06
3704 LP Zeist
The Netherlands
Dear Joe,

NEGATIVE BURN #28, in a flash.

By the by, these issues sure seem to come out quicker than I can say "Open Hailing frequencies," don't they?

"Dusty Star" was brilliant stuff. Andrew Robinson is a great artist, that much I already knew from his beautiful posters and illustrations for KILROY IS HERE features in the past. What really surprised me, though, was you writing a western oriented tale. Wow, this seems to be made with even more enthusiasm than any of your other work, Joe! I take it you like western movies?

"Alan Moore's Songbook" turned out to be one of the best installments yet. James Owen is a great guy, a great writer, but first and foremost, I think of him as a classic artist. This feature once more established that in a fashion rather convincing.

The Verheiden/Meyer Jr. feature "Favorite Song" deserves high praise as well. Not only did it show that Ken's art looks so much better when it's painted, it also proved that this book still is going strong when it comes to displaying an extremely wide variation of all sorts of different themes. Good job.

"JuJu Eyes" was a tad copy-heavy, but once I got into the story, I was beginning to see that this here was full of potential. Therefore, I was more than shocked to see that the conclusion to this short story was rather simple. Violence, cold-blooded hatred, anger—I don't think it belongs in comic books unless there's enough to justify it. In this case, there was no justification whatsoever, though. Too bad, 'cos the art and the writing were rather good.

Finally, "Pedestrian" deserves the monthly award for funniest feature. Delightfully hilarious depicting of what might be an everyday event, with funny dialogue from Paul Erickson and artwork form Paul Fricke—art which was right on target, panel after panel. More!

All in all, best issue in a while. Keep it up, I'd say.

Yes, I like western movies, but not as much as Andrew Robinson does! Andy's presently hard at work illustrating the first issue of the new DUSTY STAR series we'll be working on. There's no set release date for the series yet (as we'd like to get the first couple of issue done before soliciting the first), but you can bet I'll notify you right here when it's ready! And yes, I am pretty enthusiastic about the project. I'm glad it shows.

CALIBER COMICS

FEBRUARY 1996

CAVEWOMAN: RAIN #1
Caliber's premiere issue features Cavewoman in the time traveling town of Marshville, where she encounters tornadoes, furious storms, and restless prehistoric beasts from one to one-hundred tons! Written and illustrated by Budd Root. $2.95.

DOORMAN: FAMILY SECRETS #2
DoorMan finds himself drawn deeper into the mystery that surrounds the twin sisters and the secret that haunts them both. Written by Mike Leonard and illustrated by James Lyle. $2.95.

KABUKI:CIRCLE OF BLOOD G.N.
This compilation collects all 6 issues of the acclaimed Kabuki series, plus an expanded story, sketchbook and pin-up gallery! Circle of Blood delves into the world of the NOH, a Japanese government agency, who employ an assassin known as Kabuki with a dangerous job...to become an icon for a country in a war between technology and tradition. Written and illustrated by David Mack. 272 pages for $16.95.

KILROY IS HERE #7
In this issue Kilroy is witness to an 11-year old girl in war torn Bosnia-Herzegovina living through the death of her family, attempted rape by soldiers, and the end of her innocence. Written by Joe Pruett and illustrated by Mike Perkins. $2.95.

NEGATIVE BURN #32
Well-known and respected creators Joyce Brabner and Mark Badger bring us "Survivors," an honest look at growing up Cambodian in America. Also in this issue Craig Gilmore, Stephan Petrucha, and many more...64 pages! $3.95.

NEGATIVE BURN: Best of Year Two
Featuring the best short stories of the second year in a 128 page Graphic Novel! Creators include: Alan Moore, Evan Dorkin, Paul Pope, Phillip Hester, Nabiel Kanan, Brian Bolland, Andrew Robinson and many more! $9.95

OZ #14
Ozma declares that the time has come to begin the war. Meanwhile, in the palace of the Emerald City, the Freedom Fighters must battle the Nome King and a horde of winged monkeys under his control, including their former comrade Nameless! Written by Ralph Griffith and Stuart Kerr with art by Bill Bryan. $2.95

THE SCYTHE #1
Psychiatrist Richard Smythe seemed to have it all, until his wife and child are murdered while he helplessly watches. Sickened by his fear and powerlessness...a despair that can only be lifted by vengeance and atonement...an force known only as the Scythe. Written by Gregg Kendrick with art by Ed Herrera. $2.95

TATTOO #2
Tattoo arrives in New Orleans and assists a gang of humans called Blues before continuing her quest for the "Gate Opener." Written by Ralph Griffith and Stuart Kerr with art by Jake Jacobsen (Aquaman). $2.95

WORLDS OF H.P. LOVECRAFT: The Statement of Randolph Carter
A New York criminal psychologist invades a grave to uncover the secret of "why certain corpses never decay..?" Adaption by Steve Jones with art by Chris Jones. $2.95

WORDSMITH #2
This issue centers around two different inspirations. The first concerns a writers ethical problem, should he surrender his integrity to please a bigoted employer. The second tells the story of an orphaned boy who is abused by his foster father. Written by Dave Darrigo and illustrated by R.G. Taylor. $2.95

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1-800-346-8940 for order information

Caliber Forum

There are a lot of exciting things going on at Caliber lately. In a market that seems to be in a flux right now, our sales have more than DOUBLED in the past year. This shows that Caliber titles are not based on "trends", but on solid storytelling that defies the ups-and-downs of other independents. All Caliber titles have had paper stock upgrades to a 50 lb. white offset. That means whiter paper, darker inks, and less bleed-through on a stiffer stock! While paper prices have been soaring recently, we've greatly upgraded our production quality and haven't raised our prices one darn cent!

Part of the excitement Caliber is generating is because of recently signed agreements to work with some of the most influential artists and writers in the industry today. Along with the titles listed, be on the lookout for exciting offerings such as:

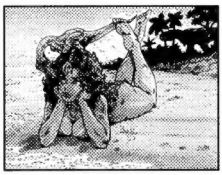
Moebius Comics

Yes, this is not a hoax, this is not a dream. *Moebius Comics* will be premiering early next year. This will be a bi-monthly series, featuring art and stories not only from Moebius, but also from some of comic's biggest artists, who will be finishing Moebius' layouts. This will be the ultimate collection of an international comic book legend's captivating work.

The works of Moebius have primarily been seen in Europe, with his American visibility limited to issues of *Heavy Metal* and the *Lt. Blueberry* series from Marvel's Epic. With all new material developed exclusively for this series, Caliber helps make the detailed art and flowing lines more available to American audiences.

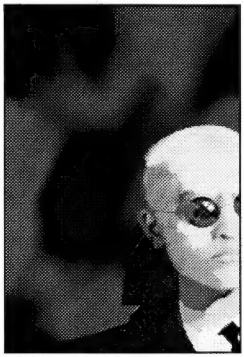
Cavewoman

Budd Root's very popular series about bikinis and brachiosaurs, drama and dinosaurs, and the travails of a time-tossed town, joins Caliber in this new bi-monthly series.



Mister X

This the one that started it all. A new genre of story-telling, a detective story with a decidedly different look, Mr. X was a ground-breaker when it first came out in the 1980s. Now look for all-new stories of



William Mark's character that never sleeps.

From the bowels of Radiant City, a mysterious man haunts the twisted labyrinths within. He fights against the very architecture that he helped create. He is the man with no name -- a man known simply as Mr. X.

Featuring the art of Gene Gonzales, noted for his crisp style on *Aquaman* from DC and *The Apparition* from Caliber. Also look for other *Mister X* stories to appear in the *New Worlds Anthology* action/adventure title later this year!

Caliber Forum

Jinx

Continuing within the world created in *AKA Goldfish*, Brian Michael Bendis returns with *Jinx*. Debuting in March, Jinx is a female bounty hunter that always gets her man...

Nowheresville

Mark Ricketts new regular series is set in a place where beatniks and be-bop collide with deadly results. See why everybody's groovin' with the beat in a culture beset with hepcats and Jack Kerouac wannabes. Chic Mooney is a criminal detective in this retro '50s high society scene, so jetset to you local retailer and ask, "What's in the bag, daddy-o?"

The Apparition

In this all new ongoing series, James Pruett takes on stories of soul-searching, introspection and healing, through which Adriel, the Angel of Benevolence, visits those in need of his spiritual guidance.

Kabuki

Coming soon, "Masks of the Noh" features covers by Joe Quesada, and interiors by such notables as Rick Mays, Andrew Robinson, Caesar, Buzz and Dave Johnson.

RUST RETURNS!

Steve Miller and Phillip Hester revive their rust-coated character in all-new adventures of the oxidized avenger.

WORDSMITH

Representing this classic series from Dave Darrigo and R.G. Taylor. It's the saga of a pulp writer in the early 1940s, how he is drawn into his adventure episodes, and how it reflects the current state of his life.

ESPERS/INTERFACE

Full-color compilations are now available of James Hudnall's award-winning stories in a special graphic-novel format.

DOORMAN

The hit that was previously published by Cult Press is now published by Caliber in an all-new series. Can a man change his own past, to destroy his present nightmares? Find out when creators Mike Leonard and James Lyle continue the saga in *Doorman*.

LEGENDLORE

NEW WORLDS. People are already talking about this fantasy-based title that shipped this past January. It introduces readers to the realm of A'zoth and, in particular, to a female Forest Elf by a name that may sound vaguely familar to some. *LegendLore* is a tale weaved about strife, loss and purity tainted by a bitter thirst for revenge.

KILROY IS HERE

Kilroy has wandered throughout the centuries and is drawn to scenes of human suffering. An avenger of the pain of the innocent, Kilroy brandishes his own painful kind of justice in this ongoing series scribed by creator Joe Pruett.

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